

PREPARED STATEMENT OF
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SECRETARY OF COMMERCE

Before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation

United States Senate

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Mr. Chairman, Senator Hollings, and Members of the Committee:

It is a pleasure to appear before this Committee again and, on this occasion, to discuss with you Census 2000.

Census 2000: An Invaluable Achievement

I have said that the 2000 Census is the most accurate census this nation has ever conducted. A Constitutional mandate, censuses have been conducted every 10 years since 1790 -- 22 times in all. So the success of Census 2000 is a remarkable achievement. It is attributable to the hard work and dedication of the professional staff at the Census Bureau and all the hundreds of thousands of people, including thousands of your constituents, who worked on Census 2000. I commend them all. We are indebted also to the American public, whose response exceeded expectations; to the thousands of Census partner organizations; and to the Congress, for your oversight, support, and vision in providing sufficient resources to conduct Census 2000.

This is an exciting period for those who want facts to bolster their understanding of our nation's people. The Census Bureau began to roll out the results of Census 2000 just three months ago, with the release of the state population totals used for apportionment. Again meeting the schedule set by the Congress, by the end of this week, the Census Bureau will have released for all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, population data--by age, race, and Hispanic Origin--that will be used to redraw legislative districts.

Not only do these current data releases allow the redistricting process to begin, but these are the first data from Census 2000 for counties, cities, towns, townships, and smaller geographic areas. They are the first race and ethnicity data from Census 2000, and the first to show the effect of multiple race reporting. Not a day has gone by in the last month without numerous news stories about the increasing diversity of our population and about which areas are growing in population and by how much. I share the fascination: These data tell us so much about ourselves, our neighbors, our great country. This gold mine of information will continue to yield a wealth of information as the Census Bureau prepares and releases much more data over the next two years. All of this attention focused on population data reminds us what an important national resource we have in the census.

Census 2000: An Operational Success

Census 2000 was an operational success. The Census Bureau met or exceeded its goals, including meeting the mandated deadlines for releasing data for use in apportionment and

redistricting. This success can be attributed to the Congress' commitment to provide full funding for a number of improvements, including unprecedented outreach programs to groups that historically had the highest undercounts :

Ž **Marketing and Partnerships:** First, the Census Bureau implemented a multi-faceted, aggressive marketing and partnership program to encourage householders to include themselves in the census, by completing and mailing back their census forms. Based on the experience of declining response rates over the preceding three censuses, the Bureau had anticipated that fewer households would return forms by mail in Census 2000. Partnerships--140,000 in all--with state, local, and tribal governments; community and advocacy groups; the private sector; religious organizations; educational institutions; and the Congress were key to building support and removing obstacles to participation in the census. The Bureau successfully implemented paid advertising for the first time in Census 2000, placing over \$100 million in media buys designed to educate and motivate the public to respond. Paid advertising also allowed the Census Bureau to target ads to groups that had been undercounted at higher rates in past censuses.

Ž **Educating Families:** As part of the Census in Schools program, the Census Bureau provided lesson plans, wall maps, and take-home materials to classroom teachers so they could teach lessons on the census.

Ž User Friendly Questionnaires: The Census Bureau designed the questionnaires so that they would be easier to read and fill out. The Bureau also sent advance letters and reminder cards before and after the questionnaires were mailed out to increase response. The Bureau further offered multiple ways to respond, to ensure everyone had a chance to include themselves in the census. These included printing questionnaires in six languages and making available upon request materials in 49 languages to assist people in completing the questionnaire.

These cumulative outreach efforts were successful. The expected mail response rate of 61 percent was significantly exceeded, reaching about 65 percent by the start of the field operation to follow up on homes for which a questionnaire was not returned.

Ž Staffing: The Census Bureau hired and retained enough highly skilled temporary staff, throughout the course of the census, to complete all operations on time. Because of a resourceful recruiting plan, research on pay rates and recruiting, and the attractive wages that the Census Bureau could offer because of the full census funding that the Congress provided, the Census Bureau was able to recruit some 3.7 million job candidates and eventually hire 960,000 people over the course of the census. Over 500,000 worked on the operation to follow up on those homes for which a questionnaire was not returned, and, through their hard work, the Census Bureau was able to complete the enormous task of personally visiting 42 million homes slightly ahead of schedule.

Ž Quality Checks: Because of the timely completion of the follow-up operation, the Census Bureau had the time and resources to conduct other operations designed to improve coverage, including additional re-enumeration efforts in selected areas. The Census Bureau called these operations “Quality Counts.” Based on Census Bureau experience and using various quality indicators, the Census Bureau identified about 10 percent of the Nation’s homes that it believed should be visited again in these review, verification, and clean-up operations. If it had not conducted these additional operations, the Census Bureau would have provided an incomplete enumeration of the population. The “Quality Counts” operations helped improve coverage and the census count.

Ž Technology: For Census 2000, the Census Bureau used digital imaging and optical-character recognition technology for the first time to recognize handwritten answers in addition to marked circles or boxes. This was a vast improvement over previous computer systems and allowed the Census Bureau to process the data faster and introduce quality assurance steps to be sure they had captured the data accurately. During the peak of questionnaire receipts, the Census Bureau’s data capture centers processed 3.3 million forms a day. Each bit of information on the captured census forms was transmitted over secured lines to the Census Bureau headquarters, where staff performed quality control checks to ensure they had complete data. The improved data capture systems, with the ability to capture names, also meant that the

Census Bureau could offer multiple options for responding to the census with confidence that it could find and remove duplicate responses.

The Result: A Highly Accurate Headcount

The operational improvements not only contributed to the ability to meet legal deadlines, but more importantly they also produced an improved count. The Census Bureau conducted an independent survey of approximately 314,000 housing units--called the Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation (A.C.E.)--that was designed to measure net census coverage. It was also designed to measure differences in coverage rates for key groups.

The first chart attached to this testimony illustrates the remarkable job the Census Bureau did in counting people in Census 2000. According to current estimates from the A.C.E., Census 2000 achieved a net coverage rate for the total population of 98.82 percent. Even better, the estimated coverage rates for individual groups were also very high. The coverage rate for Non-Hispanic Blacks was 97.83 percent; for Hispanics, 97.15 percent; for American Indians and Alaska Natives on Reservations, 95.26 percent; for American Indians and Alaska Natives off Reservations, 96.72 percent; for Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, 95.40 percent; for Non-Hispanic Asians, 99.04 percent; and for Non-Hispanic Whites, 99.33 percent. The A.C.E. results thus support the conclusion that Census 2000 achieved both reduced net and differential undercoverage from 1990 census levels.

Attached are two additional charts showing estimated net undercount rates for key groupings of the population for 1990 and 2000. Chart 2 shows net undercount rates for the total population and race and Hispanic-origin groups. Chart 3 shows net undercount rates for age and sex groups, owners, and renters.

The A.C.E. estimates that the net national undercount was reduced from the 1990 census rate of 1.61 percent to 1.18 percent for Census 2000, a reduction of about one-fourth. This reduction is substantial and reflects high census quality. The A.C.E. further found that not only was the net undercount reduced, but there was a substantial reduction in the undercount rates for certain groups and in the differential undercount. In 1990, minorities, renters, and children were differentially undercounted, that is, undercounted at higher rates than the population as a whole. While these groups still have higher undercount rates, the differential has dropped considerably.

The estimated undercount rate for Non-Hispanic Blacks was cut by about half -- it dropped from 4.57 percent in 1990 to 2.17 percent in 2000; and the estimated undercount rate for Hispanics dropped by about 40 percent from 4.99 percent to 2.85 percent. The undercount rate for American Indians and Alaska Natives on Reservations in Census 2000 was 4.74 percent, a reduction of about 60 percent from the 12.22 percent published for 1990. For American Indians and Alaska Natives off Reservations, Native Hawaiians and Other Pacific Islanders, and Non-Hispanic Asians, Census 2000 showed undercount rates of 3.28 percent, 4.60 percent, and 0.96 percent, respectively. The undercount rate for renters has dropped from 4.51 percent to 2.75 percent and for children has been reduced by about half from 3.18 percent to

1.54 percent.

The Question of Statistical Adjustment

Throughout the planning for Census 2000, a major issue of concern to the Census Bureau was whether the results of the A.C.E. could be used to make the census counts more accurate. In June 2000, the Census Bureau Director preliminarily decided that using the A.C.E. for this purpose was generally feasible, but to reach a final decision, it would be necessary to consider operational data to validate the successful conduct of the A.C.E., to assess whether the A.C.E. measurements of undercount are consistent with historical patterns of undercount and independent demographic analysis benchmarks, and to review measures of quality.¹ The Bureau has long used demographic analysis as an independent check on the quality of the count. Unlike the A.C.E., which is a sample survey, demographic analysis uses records and estimates of births, deaths, legal immigration, and Medicare enrollments, and estimates of emigration and net undocumented immigration to estimate the national population, separately from the census.

A team of Census Bureau professionals--called the Executive Steering Committee for A.C.E. Policy or ESCAP--was formed to conduct the evaluation to determine whether using the A.C.E. to adjust the census figures would improve the results for use in redistricting. After extensive meetings and staff work and the review of many analytic reports, the ESCAP completed its report², and Acting

¹"Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation: Statement on the Feasibility of Using Statistical Methods to Improve the Accuracy of Census 2000."

²"Report of the Executive Steering Committee for Accuracy and Coverage Evaluation Policy: Recommendation Concerning the Methodology to be Used in Producing the Tabulations of Population

Director Barron submitted that report and recommendation, along with his recommendation, to me on March 1, 2001.

As a member of the ESCAP and as Acting Director, Mr. Barron concurred with and approved the ESCAP's recommendation that unadjusted census data be released as the Census Bureau's official redistricting data. The ESCAP reached its recommendation because it was unable, based on the data and other information it had at the time, to conclude that the adjusted data were more accurate for use in redistricting.

The ESCAP found that both the census and the A.C.E. were of very high quality. The primary reason for arriving at its conclusion that unadjusted data should be released was the apparent inconsistency between A.C.E. and demographic analysis. The demographic analysis estimates are significantly lower than both Census 2000 and the A.C.E. estimates for important population groups. The ESCAP investigated this inconsistency extensively, but in the time available could not adequately explain it. The ESCAP noted that the inconsistency between the demographic analysis estimates and the A.C.E. estimates is most likely the result of one or more of three scenarios:

Ž First, that the 1990 census and the associated coverage measurement methodologies together undercounted the population by a significantly greater amount and degree than previously believed,

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but that Census 2000 included portions of this previously unenumerated population.

Ž Second, that demographic analysis may not have accounted for the full population growth between 1990 and 2000.

Ž Third, that Census 2000, as corrected by the A.C.E., overestimates the Nation's population.

The Census Bureau must further investigate these concerns before it can recommend that adjustment would improve accuracy of data for purposes other than redistricting. It is also investigating other potential errors that could affect the accuracy of the adjusted numbers. All of these issues are discussed in detail in the ESCAP's report, which we are making available for the record.

After receiving the Census Bureau's recommendation, I thoroughly reviewed the ESCAP's report and supporting materials, and I obtained advice from a diverse group of prominent, non-government statisticians and demographers, in addition to the advice of the Census Bureau professionals. On March 7, I announced my decision to release the unadjusted data for use in the redistricting process. In making my decision, I followed a process that was transparent, reasonable and fair, and took full account of the view of career professionals and outside experts.

I should emphasize that ESCAP could not have resolved the critical questions about use of adjusted data prior to the April 1 deadline for completing release of redistricting data to the states, or even soon thereafter. I am confident that the Committee did all that it could, and that it reached the only reasonable conclusion.

The Road Ahead to Census 2010

As I have said many times, Census 2000 is the most accurate in our nation's history. But we cannot rest on our laurels. The Census Bureau has already begun looking toward 2010.

While Census 2000 was an operational success and produced data of high quality, the process was costly, many people felt burdened by having to answer the long form questions, and the census was constantly at risk due to insufficient early planning and development, and disagreement on the design. If the Census Bureau has adequate resources early to build upon the successes of Census 2000, then it can reduce operational risks for the 2010 census and explore ways to further reduce the undercount.

In a letter of January 17, 2001, from Mr. Chris Mihm of the General Accounting Office to my predecessor, Secretary of Commerce Norman Mineta, Mr. Mihm announced that Census 2000 had been removed from the GAO's list of high-risk Federal government programs. That Census 2000 was on this list is a reminder of the great challenges the Census Bureau faced and overcame in conducting a successful census. In his letter, Mr. Mihm stated:

“As the Bureau plans for the 2010 Census, it will be important for the Department of Commerce to ensure that the Bureau completes its evaluations of key census operations as

planned, and in a timely manner, explores innovative options that could help ensure a cost-effective headcount in 2010.”

Completing Census 2000 evaluations will shed further light on what worked well or did not work in this census. To build on the success of Census 2000, to reduce operational risk, and to reduce the undercount even further, the Census Bureau must improve the accuracy of its geographic database and Master Address File, eliminate the long form from the decennial census by collecting those data in the American Community Survey, and reengineer the census process through early planning. The improved geographic systems will ensure that there is a complete and unduplicated address list and will facilitate automation and electronic data collection.

In this regard, the American Community Survey will provide more frequent detailed data for small geographic areas and allow the Federal statistical system to keep pace with ever increasing demands for timely and relevant data. And it will revolutionize the way we take the decennial census by simplifying the 2010 census requirements and allowing the Census Bureau to focus exclusively on the basic count. However, early 2010 planning and development is necessary for a re-engineered process for the 2010 census, taking advantage of opportunities provided by having improved geographic systems and the American Community Survey.

As reflected in the President’s budget, details of which will be released shortly, the Administration supports the Census Bureau’s 2010 efforts. I look forward to working with Members of this Committee,

other interested Committees and Members of Congress, to define and provide appropriate support for the total Census 2010 effort. We cannot delay, as every day brings us closer to what will be an even greater challenge to capture our increasingly diverse, vibrant population.

Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.